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THE SPIRIT OF EASTER

EASTER, ecclesiastical or secular, should be celebrated in a joyous spirit. Undoubtedly a survival of the old pagan festival of spring, it signifies a reawakening. Nature throws off the lethargy of winter and dons new garments. So does humanity, especially that portion of it to which the creators of beautiful habiliments cater. The

memoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which thus coincides with the vernal resurrection of Nature. The very name Easter, however, pertains to the great antiquity of the festival, since, like the names of the days of the week, it is a survival of the old Teutonic mythology. Ostern is the German for Easter, and according to Bede it is de-



La Chanson du Printemps. By Deyrolle

chrysalis that was buried in Lenten woe, bursts into the bright butterfly of Easter. It ever has been so. The fashionable "Easter parade" of today was ante-dated by many centuries by the processions incidental to the celebration of the ancient spring festival.

The joyous spirit of this festival has been caught up and adapted by the church, which preserves it in com-

rived from Eostre, or Ostâra, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring, to whom the month answering to our April, and called Eostur-Monath, was dedicated. This month, Bede says further, was the same as the mensis paschalis. "when the old festival was observed with the gladness of a new solemnity."

The name of the festival in several other languages (French, pâques; Ital-

ian, pasqua; Spanish, pascua; Danish, paaske; Dutch, paasch; Welsh, pasg) is derived ultimately from the Chaldee or Aramæan form, pascha, of the Hebrew name of the Passover festival, signifying "he passed over", in memory of the great deliverance, when the destroying angel "passed over the houses of the Children of Israel in Egypt when he smote the Egyptians." There again is a derivation showing the very ancient origin of the festival.

No indication of the observance of the Easter festival is found in the New Testament, or in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. Indeed it appears as if the sanctity of special times was an idea that failed to enter the minds of the first Christians; that neither the Lord nor his apostles enjoined the keeping of this or any other festival, is stated by one of the early ecclesiastic historians. "The apostles had no thought of appointing festival days, but of promoting a life of blamelessness and piety"; and he attributes the observance of Easter by the Church to the perpetuation of the old usage, "just as many other customs have been established."

This means that the first Christians continued to observe the Jewish festivals, though in a new spirit, as commemorations of events which these festivals appeared to them to have foreshadowed. Thus the Passover, with a new conception added to it of Christ as a true Paschal Lamb and the first fruits from the dead, continued to be observed, and became the Christian Easter.

We would find it difficult to understand today, how it was that, although the observance of Easter was at a very early period the practice of the Chris-

tian church, such a serious difference as to the day for its observance soon arose between the Christians of Jewish and those of Gentile descent. This led to a long and bitter controversy. The point at issue was as to when the Passover Fast was to be reckoned as ending. With the Jewish Christians the leading thought was that of the death of Christ as of the Paschal Lamb. Hence with them the fast ended at the same time as that of the Jews—on the fourteenth day of the moon at evening—and the Easter festival immediately followed, without regard to the day of the week. The Gentile Christians on the other hand, being unswayed by Jewish tradition, wholly ignored the day of the month and insisted upon Sunday, the first day of the week, as the Resurrection, and the preceding Friday as the commemoration of the crucifixion. Thus with one party the observance of the day of the month, with the other the observance of the day of the week, was the guiding principle.

Curious differences resulted. As a whole, the Western Church kept Easter on the first day of the week, while the Eastern church followed the Jewish rule, and kept Easter on the fourteenth day. It is sad to reflect that a Christian festival, intended to be one of joy, should have caused so much bitterness. But in the year 197 the question was discussed in a most hostile spirit between Victor, Bishop of Rome, and Polycrates, Metropolitan of Proconsular Asia. That province was the only portion of Christendom which still adhered to the Jewish usage and Victor demanded that all should adopt the usage prevailing at Rome. When Poly-

crates firmly refused to agree to this, urging many weighty reasons against it, Victor proceeded to excommunicate Polycrates and the Christians who continued the Eastern usage. It was a final settlement of the dispute that was one of the reasons for the summoning by Constantine of the famous Council of Nicæa in 325. At that time the Syrians and Antiochones were the solitary champions of the observance of the fourteenth day. The decision of the council was unanimous that Easter was to be kept on Sunday, and on the same Sunday throughout the world. The correct date of the Easter festival was to be calculated at Alexandria, the home of astronomical science, and the bishop of that see was to announce it to the churches under his jurisdiction and also to the occupant of the Roman see, by whom it was to be communicated to the Western churches. Briefly—the subject being too complicated for full explanation here—Easter day is the first Sunday under the full moon following the vernal equinox. But as this varies in different longitudes, while a further difficulty occurred in the attempt to fix the correct time of Easter by means of cycles of years, when the changes of sun or moon more or less exactly repeat themselves, it happened, owing to this lack of decision as to the accurate finding of Easter and as St. Augustine tells us, that in the year 387 the churches of Gaul kept Easter on the 21st of March, those of Italy on the 18th of April, and those of Egypt on the 25th of April; and it appears from a letter of Leo the Great that in the year 455 there was a difference of eight days between the Roman and the Alexandrine Easter. A difference in the

cycles for computing Easter between the Roman and the ancient British and Celtic churches led to Easter being observed on different Sundays in certain years, in England, by the adherents of the two churches. Bede records that in a certain year (which must have been 645, 647, 648 or 651) Queen Eanfleda, who had been brought up to the Roman observance, was fasting and keeping Palm Sunday, while her husband, Oswy, King of Northumbria, following the rule of the British church, was celebrating the Easter festival.

As no husband, be he king or subject, wishes his wife to be fasting while he is feasting, it was natural that, after a good deal of disputation had taken place, with more in prospect, Oswy determined to take a hand in the matter himself. Accordingly he summoned the heads of the contending parties to a conference at Whitby, A.D. 664. At this conference he himself presided. Colman, Bishop of Lindisfarne, represented the British church. Those who favoured the Roman observance were headed by the Bishop of Dorchester and by Wilfrid, a young Saxon. Wilfrid was spokesman. In "The Book of Days" it is stated that the arguments were characteristic of the age, but that the manner in which the king decided irresistibly provokes a smile, and makes one wonder whether it were in jest or earnest.

Colman spoke first and urged that the custom of the Celtic church ought not to be changed, because that custom had been inherited from their forefathers, men beloved of God, etc. Wilfrid followed: "The Easter which we observe," he said, "I saw celebrated by all at Rome; there, where the blessed



Easter Procession in Brittany.
By Breton

apostles Peter and Paul lived, taught, suffered and were buried." He concluded a really powerful speech with these words: "And admitting that your St. Columba was, which I will not deny, a holy man, gifted with the power of working miracles, is he I ask, to be preferred before the most blessed Prince of the Apostles, to whom our Lord said, "Thou art Peter and upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it; and to them will I give the keys of the kingdom of Heaven?"

The King, turning to Colman, asked him, "Is it true or not, Colman, that these words were spoken to Peter by our Lord?" Colman, who seems to have been completely cowed, could not deny it. "It is true, O King." "Then," said the King, "Can you show me any such power given to your Columba?" Colman answered, "No". "You are both, then, agreed," continued the King, "are you not, that these words were addressed principally to Peter, and that to him were given the keys of heaven by our Lord?" Both assented.

"Then," said the King, "I tell you, I shall not stand opposed to the door-keeper of the kingdom of heaven; I desire, as far as in me lies, to adhere to his precepts and obey his commands, lest by offending him who keepeth the keys, I should, when I present myself at the gate, find no one to open it to me."

This settled the controversy, though poor honest Colman resigned his see rather than submit to such a decision. It may have been noticed that the King settled the controversy in accordance with the custom observed by his wife; which probably was not the first time,

as it certainly has not been the last, that a difference in opinion has been settled in that way.

The Gregorian correction of the calendar in 1582 once more led to different days being observed. But so far as Western Christendom is concerned the corrected calendar is now exclusively accepted, and Easter is kept on the same day. It was not until 1752, however, that the Gregorian reformation of the calendar was adopted in Great Britain and Ireland. Because Easter, as commemorating the central fact of the Christian religion, is regarded as the chief festival of the Christian year, Constantine made it the first day of the year; and this reckoning of the year as beginning at Easter lingered in France till 1565, when, by an ordinance of Charles IX, the first of January finally took its place.

Among the many ecclesiastical ceremonies that, developing from early times, long clustered round the celebration of the Easter festival, one of the most notable was the use of the paschal candle, a candle of very large dimensions, set in a candlestick big enough to hold it, which was usually placed at the north side, just below the first ascent to the altar. It was to be kept alight during each service till Whitsuntide. The Paschal, as this candle was called at Durham Cathedral, was one of the great sights of that church before the Reformation. This is described as an elaborate construction of polished brass, which, contrary to the usual custom, seems to have been placed in the center of the altar-step. Long branches stretching out towards the four Cardinal points bore smaller candles. The central stem of the can-

dlestick was about thirty-eight feet high, and held the paschal candle proper. Together they attained a height of seventy feet. The candle was lighted from an opening above. Other paschal candles seem to have been of scarcely less size. At Lincoln, about 1300, the candle was to weigh three stones of wax; at Salisbury in 1517 it was to be thirty-six feet long; and at Westminster, in 1558, it weighed no less than three hundredweights of wax. After Whitsuntide,

there is goes against the medieval use of such decorations, which are so popular at the present day.

About Easter 1333, a curious occurrence took place at Durham. The Queen of Edward III, having followed the king to that city, was conducted by him though the gate of the abbey to the prior's lodgings, where, having supped and gone to bed with her royal ruler, she was soon disturbed by one of the monks, who intimated to the King that



Young Girls on the way to join an Easter Procession. By Breton

what remained was made into smaller candles for the funerals of the poor. The bearing of the paschal candle still forms part of the Easter ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church. On Easter day depend all the movable feasts and fasts throughout the year.

The liturgical colour for Easter was everywhere white, as a sign of joy, light and purity, and the churches and altars were adorned with the best ornaments that each possessed. Flowers and shrubs, no doubt, in early times were also used for this purpose, but what evidence

St. Cuthbert by no means loved the company of women. The Queen, upon this, got out of bed, and having hastily dressed herself, went to the castle for the remaining part of the night, asking pardon for the crime she had inadvertently been guilty of against the patron saint of the church.

At Puy in France, from time immemorial to the X century, it was customary, on the first psalm of Matins if a canon was absent from the choir, for some of the canons and vicars, taking with them the cross and the Holy water, to go to

the house of the absentee, sing the "Haec dies", sprinkle him with water if he was still in bed, and lead him to the church. In punishment he had to give breakfast to his conductors. A similar custom is found in the XV century at Nantes and Angers, where it was prohibited by the diocesan synods in 1431 and 1448. In some parts of Germany parents and children try to

In some countries, on the eve of Easter, the homes are blessed. This is in memory of the passing of the angel in Egypt and the signing of the four-posts with the blood of the paschal lamb. The parish priest visits the houses of his parish for this purpose. In Rome the Papal apartments are blessed on this day. The room, however, in which the Pope is found by the visiting Car-



An Easter Flower Market, Paris. By Robbe

surprise each other in bed on Easter morning, and the party scoring the surprise, has the right to switch the other.

In both the Oriental and Latin churches it was customary to have those victuals which were prohibited during Lent, blessed by the priests before eating them on Easter day, especially meat, eggs, butter and cheese. Those who ate before the food was blessed, according to popular belief, were punished by God, sometimes instantaneously.

dinal is blessed by the Pontiff himself.

The Greeks and Russians after their long, severe Lent, make Easter a day of popular sports. At Constantinople the cemetery of Pera is the neighboring rendezvous of the Greeks. There are music, dances and all the pleasures of an Oriental popular resort; the same custom prevails in the cities of Russia. In Russia anyone can enter the belfries on Easter and ring the bells, a privilege of which many persons avail themselves.

Some of the customs growing out of the joyous spirit of Easter are not only gay, but decidedly boisterous. Thus in Lancashire and in Cheshire, Staffordshire and Warwickshire, and perhaps in other counties, according to "The Book of Days"—the ridiculous custom of "lifting" or "heaving" is practiced. On Easter Sunday the men lift the women and, on Easter Tuesday, the women lift or heave the men. The process is performed by two lusty men or women joining hands across each other's wrists.

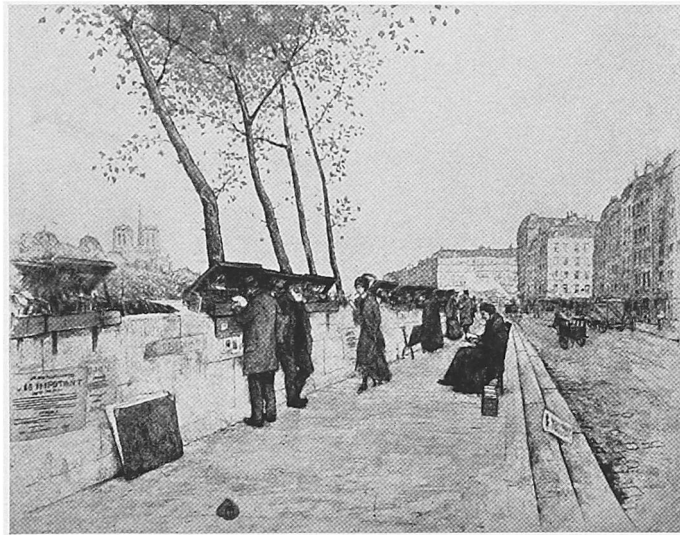
Then, making the person to be heaved sit down on their arms, they lift him up aloft two or three times, and often carry him several yards along a street.

A grave clergyman who happened to be passing through a town in Lancashire on an Easter Tuesday and having to stay an hour or two at an inn, was astonished by three or four lusty women rushing into his room, exclaiming they had come "to lift him." "To lift me!" repeated the astonished divine. "What can you mean?" "Why, your reverence, we're come to lift you, cause it's Easter Tuesday." "Lift me because it's Easter Tuesday? I don't understand. Is there any such custom here?" "Yes, to be sure; why, don't you know? All us women was lifted yesterday; and so we lifts the men to-day in turn. And in course it's

our rights and dues to lift 'em." After a little further parley, the reverend traveller compromised with his fair visitors for half-a-crown and thus escaped the dreaded compliment.

In Durham, on Easter Monday, the men claim the privilege of taking off the women's shoes, and the next day the women retaliate. Incidentally, both ecclesiastics and laics used to play at ball in the churches for tansy-cakes on Eastertide; and, though the profane part of this custom—the playing at ball

in sacred edifices—is discontinued, tansy-cakes and tansy-puddings are still favoured dishes on Easter in many parts. In some parishes in the counties of Dorset and Devon, the clerk carries round to every house, a few white cakes as



The Approach of Spring, Quai des Grands Augustins, Paris

an Easter offering. These cakes, which are about an eighth of an inch thick, are of two sizes, the larger being seven or eight inches, the smaller about five in diameter. They have a mingled bitter and sweet taste. We know that the Anglo-Saxon, and indeed the German race in general, were in the habit of eating consecrated cakes at their religious festivals. Our hot cross buns on Easter are only the cakes which the pagan Saxons ate in honour of their Goddess Eastre, and from which the Christian clergy, who were unable to prevent the people from eating the

cakes, sought to expel the paganism by marking them with the cross.

As for games of ball at Easter, in France, as well as in Germany, hand-ball playing was one of the Easter amusements. The ball probably represented the sun, which was believed to take three leaps in rising on Easter morning. Bishops, priests and monks, after the strict discipline of Lent, played ball during Easter week. This was called *libertas Decembrica*, because in December the masters used to play ball with servants, maids, and shepherds. The game was connected with a dance, in which even Bishops and Abbots took part. At Auxerre, Besançon, etc., the dance was performed in

church to the strains of the "*Victimae paschali*." In England also, the game of ball was a favoured Easter sport in which the municipal corporation engaged with due parade and dignity; and at Bury St. Edwards, up to within the last century, the game was kept up with great spirit by twelve old women. After the game and the dance a banquet was given, during which a homily on the feast was read.

On Easter Monday the women had a right to strike their husbands, on

Tuesdays the men struck their wives, as in December the servants scolded their masters. During the fair on Easter day the men servants whipped the maid servants with switches; on Monday the maids whipped the men. They secure their release with Easter eggs. These customs are probably of pre-Christian origin.

The Easter Fire is laid on top of the mountains (Easter Mountain, Oster-

berg) which must be kindled from fire, drawn from wood by friction. This was a custom of pagan origin in vogue all over Europe, signifying the victory of spring over winter. The bishops issued severe edicts against the sacriligious Easter

fires, but did not succeed in abolishing them everywhere. The church adopted the observance into the Easter sermons, referring it to the fiery column in the desert and to the Resurrection of Christ; the new fire on Holy Saturday is drawn from flint, symbolizing the Resurrection of the Light of the World from the tomb closed by a stone. In some places a figure was thrown into the Easter fire, symbolizing winter, but to the Christians on the Rhine in Tyrol and Bohemia, it typified Judas.



Bouquetière. By T. F. Simon

The "Catholic Encyclopedia" mentions among peculiar customs of Easter time the risus Paschalis, or Easter laugh. This strange custom originated in Bavaria in the fifteenth century. The priest inserted in his sermon funny stories, which caused his hearers to laugh. He would give a description of how the devil tried to keep the doors of hell locked against the descending Christ. Then the speaker would draw the moral from the story. This Easter laughter, giving rise to grave abuses of the word of God, was prohibited by Clement (1670-1676) and in the eighteenth century by Maximilian III and the Bishops of Bavaria.

The colouring of eggs for Easter arose because the use of eggs was forbidden during Lent. Therefore they were carried to the table on Easter day, coloured red or some other gaudy tint, to symbolize the Easter joy. This custom is found not only in the Latin but also in the Oriental churches. The symbolic meaning of the egg as a new creation of mankind by Jesus risen from the dead was probably an invention of

later times. The custom very likely had its origin in paganism, since a great many pagan customs, celebrating the return of Spring, were transmitted or adapted to Easter. The egg is the emblem of the germinating life of early spring. Easter eggs, the children are told, come from Rome with the bells which on Thursday go to Rome and return Saturday morning. The sponsors in some countries give Easter eggs to their god-children. Coloured eggs are used by children on Easter in a sort of game which consists in testing the strength of the shells. Both coloured and un-coloured eggs are used in some parts of the United States for the game known as "egg-picking." Another practice is the "egg-rolling" by children on Easter Monday on the lawn of the White House in Washington.

The Easter rabbit lays the eggs, for which reason they are hidden in a nest in the garden. The rabbit is a pagan symbol and has always been an emblem of fertility.